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AQUATIC SKINCS AND ARBOREAL MONITORS

I have had occasion recently to identify a large collection of reptiles made by Professor Harrison W. Smith in the districts about Mt. Lundu and the Tinjar River in Sarawak. Among the specimens received were five lizards which I have provisionally identified with *Tropidophorus brookei*, and they were happily accompanied by good field notes. Smith writes that they were all caught in streams on Mt. Lundu. "They are usually found resting in the water with head out, the forelimb reaching up and grasping some rough stone or other support. When disturbed they dive, swim away well below the surface, using the tail as an organ of propulsion and in a short time reappear beside some other rock or stump."

I remembered, after reading Smith's notes, that somewhere the aquatic habitat of this genus had been noted. This was by Taylor (Phil. Jour. Sci., 12, 6, 1917, p. 379) for *Tropidophorus grayi* and Taylor remarks, "Found regularly in or near the water." I have not as yet found elsewhere among the writings of either Boulenger, Annandale, Flower, Shelford, Malcolm Smith, De Rooij or the others who have written on Malayan reptiles that this aquatic habit of life has been remarked upon before. It seems quite impossible that it has passed unnoticed and I should be interested to learn more as to these habits and the observations made in the past.

As for the monitors, I have had a fair chance to observe several species often. They are frequently aquatic although some, as *Varanus griseus* and its near allies, are apparently wholly terrestrial living in arid or grassy plains regions. Other species, like *Varanus niloticus* in Africa and the common *Varanus salvator* and *V. indicus* in the East Indies are found in swamps and along the courses of rivers and

streams and near quiet forest ponds. I remember well in the island of Ternate visiting a beautiful little crater lake up on the slope of the volcano and well to the westward of the town. The day was really memorable. I found the lake a gem and about the shores in the long grass and among the scattered shrubs were droves of monitors. They scurried off in bands, scuttling along a few yards and then stopping to see whether or not they were pursued. They were *V. indicus* and I never saw monitors in anything approaching such numbers except along a small stream near Piroe in South Ceram. My recollection is that a few of the lizards were sunning themselves on low bushes but I saw none more than a foot or two from the ground. On the day of my walk to the Ternate lake an old Malay spoke to me; he had long forgotten his English, but he tapped his chest, drew himself up and told me he was Ali Wallace. No lover of "The Malay Archipelago" but remembers Ali who was Wallace's young companion on many a hazardous journey. After my return a letter from Mr. Wallace speaks of his envy of my having so recently met his old associate.

To return to *Varanus*, however: Smith found twice, in Sarawak, *V. heteropholis* a very rare species and one described not so many years ago. One comes from the Limbang River and bears no special notes: the second was "shot according to Omar more than sixty feet above the ground. In fact, Omar had to climb a small tree himself to reach it [with his collecting gun]. Many ants were found in the lizard's stomach. The Dyaks say that this species lives in holes near the tops of trees and never comes down." However true this may be, for Malays and Dyaks while their powers of observation are unrivaled, are not always scrupulously accurate in generalizing from what they have seen, yet nevertheless, this note on the *Varanus* living high up in the hole in a forest tree

seems a fit companion to the other about what at first sight seems equally improbable—an aquatic skink.

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CORAL KING SNAKE AT KEDDIE, CALIF.

There has recently been received at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology a specimen of the Coral King Snake *Lampropeltis pyromelaena multicincta* (Yarrow) which was captured near Keddle, Plumas County, California, by Mr. E. A. Hadley. Keddle lies about 6 miles north of Quincy and is on the east branch of the North Fork of the American River at an altitude of about 3600 feet. The northernmost interior station previously reported for the species is Riverton (near Fyffe), Eldorado County (Van Denburgh, Occ. Papers Calif. Acad. Sci., V, 1897, p. 169) so that the present record extends the known range about 85 miles.

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